

**Systemic Limitations to Citizen Participation in Dominant Policymaking Regimes. The case of urban planning.** Presentation at the td-conference 2010: ***Implementation in Inter- and Transdisciplinary Research, Practice and Teaching***. University of Geneva (Uni Bastions), Geneva September 15-17, 2010, 3rd Plenary Session: Urban Planning & Participatory Approaches. Aant Elzinga, University of Gothenburg – Sweden.

## Abstract

The paper is conceptual. The role of public(s) in policy implementation appears in the framing, legitimation, and evaluation of research-based measures. Over the years vocabulary has changed from focus on “users” to emphasizing “citizens”, from government to “governance”, and from inter-“action” to “participation” or public “engagement”. This reflects transition away from structural skew and dominance favoring power elites and bureaucracies that generated a culture of political control, excluding “voiceless” people. Now, instead, private sector methods and quasi-markets foster new norms driving planning and implementation.<sup>1</sup> The new paradigm - New Public Management (NPM) - certainly opens spaces for participation. Nevertheless, case studies on Public Understanding of Science (PUS) show *genuine* citizen influence is scarce. Surprise? I argue that participation is limited because people are essentially framed in their position as customers and clients (rather than citizens). Participation and consultation resembles market research, opinion polling and PR in market-driven companies or enterprises. A *gap* remains between “citizen” involvement in word and in deed. In the history and theory of urban planning Sherry R. Arnstein’s paper, “A Ladder of Citizen Participation” (1969) forms a critical benchmark pinpointing traditional deficits in the policy-making process embedded in public bureaucracies and dominated by power elites. Her primary categories – non-participation, tokenism, and participation – will be used to probe planning and implementation regimes co-evolved with NPM (peaking in the 1990s, now declining), spurred by neoliberalism. Explanation of current deficits requires analysis of key characteristics of NPM inscribed in infrastructural planning. Key categories are agencyfication, contractualization, marketization, replacement of trust by systemic mistrust, performance measures, Audit Society, etc. All too often case studies fail to grasp this broader *context*. The trend called New Metropolitan Mainstream and both moderate and radical oppositional movements against it under the slogan “Right to the City” confirm this. Differences between the two wings of opposition to NMM are explored.

## Introduction

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<sup>1</sup> Aant Elzinga, “Globalization, New Public Management and traditional university values”, NIRPA Workshop, Swedish Research Council (VR) Stockholm 7-8 April, 2010 ([http://nirpa.org/?page\\_id=255](http://nirpa.org/?page_id=255) (click on Aant Elzinga

The main argument in the presentation is that research and action, including citizen participation to design and change urban landscapes/cityscapes must be seen as embedded in societies pressed by economic globalization that goes hand in hand with the twin pair, privatization and regionalization.

My point of departure will be the situation in Sweden, a country that for a long time has been recognized as a bastion of welfare politics and policies. During the past three decades, however, there has been considerable change driven by processes of globalization and privatization. Social democratic governments in this country triggered far-reaching processes of deregulation. Conservative governments, including the present right-of-center alliance, have driven them further. The results have been particularly evident in various sectors of society, railways, public transport, health care, education, state-owned public postal services and other areas that used to be seen as belonging to the sphere of common goods, the commons. New Public Management as a politico-administrative regime was successively introduced into one sector after another, hastening, systematizing and legitimating these developments, making it appear that it is only a technical-administrative question mainly of cost reduction, increasing flexibility, and greater accountability and efficiency of performance on the part of public service agencies and their various practitioners.

In earlier studies I have focused on the implications and impact of these developments in the university sector, which has been a relative latecomer to the processes that were unleashed. But now we as academics can no longer be unaware of the trend when it – in the name of accountability – influences our own institutions and working conditions with the influx of bibliometrics to determine performativity with measures that are frequently far from adequate, while future funding is contingent on such new metrics. A review of changing science policy doctrines and developmental trends is quite informative in this respect.

Within science and technology studies (STS) there are many case studies on new modes of public understanding of science (PUS), including the role and efficacy of focus groups, public hearings, referenda on genetically modified foods and other forms of possible citizen influence. In the discourse on governance several analysts use the notion of "scientific citizenship", and they identify different models of democracy and participation.<sup>2</sup> In my own work I have found that New Public Management (NPM) as a politico-administrative regime based on the perspective and management methods found in private businesses and corporative cultures tends to constrain and limit so-called public participation in manners that render it token like. Some of this analysis

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<sup>2</sup> Alan Irwin, "Constructing the scientific citizen: science and democracy in the biosciences", *Public Understanding of Science* Vol 10 (1), 2001 pp. 1-18; Rob Hagendijk and Alan Irwin "Public deliberation and governance: engaging with science and technology in contemporary Europe". *Minerva* Vol. 44(2) 2006 pp. 167-184.

will be drawn upon in the present paper as we turn to the question of urban planning. For earlier viewpoints on "participation" as a theme connected to research and action I wish to refer to my chapter in the *Handbook of Transdisciplinary Research* that appeared 2008.<sup>3</sup>

Some of the focus in the present paper will first of all be on the Swedish situation and then broaden the scope by referring to what internationally is now referred to as the New Metropolitan Mainstream Development in urban change. Following that, the critiques and two mutually conflicting calls to action and participation offered by oppositional movements in quest of alternatives in urban development are briefly reviewed. In the course of this presentation some key concepts are introduced in order to probe the differences in approach embodied, respectively, in what has been called a "weak program" on the one hand and a "strong program" of opposition to and in quest of an alternative to the Metropolitan Mainstream Development paradigm. It will be noted how the two different oppositional approaches imply several mutual differences regarding interlinkages between transdisciplinary research and action, i.e., the question of "implementation" in theory and practice.

### *The Swedish context*

In the 1960s and '70s during the era of a comprehensive welfare state in Sweden there was a building boom in housing. The state provided subsidies for hundreds of thousands of new rental apartments created during that time. Today, forty years later there is a drive to rebuild, renovate and meet new standards in the urban housing sector. New demands include ecological ones to reduce energy budgets using new heating methods, insulation and providing healthier living conditions.

Many of the old housing units are worn down, windows need to be replaced, often with triple-glazed panes, roofs need overhauling, and insulation has to be replaced or added. It is a matter of energy-efficient housing. The head of the environmental office of the Association of Construction Industries recently emphasized the challenge, and how it is an enormous market for the builders, contractors and supplier companies of products and services. It is envisioned that over the years to come in the entire country about 700.000 apartments and housing with between 1.2 to 2 million inhabitants will be affected.<sup>4</sup>

Critics agree that it is important to upgrade and increase energy efficiency. But they also fear that the public interest is being equated with economic development and that this will introduce further segregation in the city. Low cost rental apartments tend to be transformed into high cost condominiums with individuals who want to own them bidding in competition with each other and driving up prices on the open market. The result is a privileging of a middle class while lower class and

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<sup>3</sup> Aant Elzinga, "Participation", Chapter 22, in Gertrude Hirsch Hadorn et al. (Eds.), *Handbook of Transdisciplinary Research* (Springer Verlag 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Daniella Frellich, in *Media Planet Annons Tidningen*, No. 6/September 2010, p. 5.

immigrant families in the suburbs will be driven even further out to the periphery. Gentrification and partitioning in other words.

The official catchwords however are "strategic", "attractive" and "innovative", and in the city center this is paired with the philosophy of an "events" city, attractive to tourists and corporate investors – similar to what is happening in many other cities in the world. Homogenization with attempts to find niches for city branding, marks of distinction – or is it Disneyfication as some call it?

The experience of the last couple of decades in Sweden with deregulation to give flexibility and release free flows of capital have not been all that encouraging, least of all when it comes to social housing projects and implementing alternative citizen or community-driven ideas, visions and practical alternatives. The background is the National Plan and Building Law (PBL) of 1987. It cut away earlier red tape and controls, yes, in shaping physical planning and use of properties. The PBL also stipulates that municipalities shall invite relevant public(s) to consultation on property and water usage. The results of the deliberations however shall by no means be binding in the decision-making that follows. The value of user consultations is supposed to lie in the deliberative process itself. Additionally overview plans are no longer seen as binding.

The positive side is that room is made for greater focus on sustainable development. There are many interesting experiments with new technologies and approaches involving dialogues between municipal government officials, city planners, architect bureaus or consultants and researchers in architectural and engineering departments at universities, especially the technological universities.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand citizens rarely enter into these dialogues other than in their role as respondents to questionnaires and other opinion polling methods common to market and consumer research. Another feature is that arbitrariness has crept in; market criteria and entrepreneurialism have become mainstream in both private and mixed private-public development corporations – such hybrid private-public agency consortia and partnerships are having a heyday. The shift in terms of power has been from politics to economics. So what does this mean?

### *The Riverbank Dialogue project in Gothenburg*

An interesting example of the new situation that has emerged in urban planning after the demise of the welfare state and its bureaucracies is Gothenburg, a city on the Swedish west coast, a port. With the crash of the shipbuilding industry over thirty years ago the wharves and dockyards on the north bank of the river that cuts through the city center became obsolete and empty. A container harbor was built downstream. Today the

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. the presentation by Merritt Polk at this Conference – the new MISTRA program and consortium "Urban Futures" in Gothenburg; also  
/<[http://www.ciens.no/data/no\\_NO/file/5353.pdf](http://www.ciens.no/data/no_NO/file/5353.pdf)>/

north riverbank is the site of costly blocks of condominiums with five or six stories overlooking the waterfront. Visually an attractive site.

In the area there is also a hotel, IT industry, Ericsson especially, with plenty of office space a small science park, a branch of the technological university, a technical gymnasium, and nearby a brand new glass and steel TV house. Some of the older brick warehouses that remain have also been converted into office space and the odd museum. The bottom stories of newer houses have here and there a little bar, a tobacco shop, real estate offices, a few art galleries and the like. All innovative, but the area as a whole is stiff and sterile if one walks through it. The different functions remain separated; convenience stores are few and far between. Everyone agrees that the intended integration did not happen.

One problem pointed to is that the municipality got rid of its city architect. The municipal building agency was put in the hands of an engineer-cum-economist as director. Property was sold or leased to high bidding construction companies and contractors, each of whom hired its own architect and did their own thing to make money, as quickly as possible to get a return on investments. Profit became a key word. Overall planning was lost. Outsourcing was the name of the game, also when it came to providing infrastructure, services which is the city's responsibility, traffic routes and bus lines plus a direct ferry across the river and into a point near the heart of the city centre.

A further problem identified was that discussions had taken place behind closed boardroom doors. Real citizen influence was lacking in the development process. Corporate interests and private professionals replaced citizen consultation and public planners when it came to shaping the north river bank space.

In an attempt to dampen the critique and start on a new foot when it came to developing the other side of the river, the south shore riverbank, politicians and top city bureaucrats started project South Riverbank Dialogue. That was around the year 2003. It was launched with a highly visible kickoff, a large public meeting gathering about 400 people in a large cinema that is no longer being used for showing films except for the event of the annual Film Festival for which Gothenburg is now well-known. Thereafter six mixed groups composed of experts, young architects, cultural studies scholars, urban researchers and ordinary citizens were set up. Each group or project leader had a small budget and considerable discretionary powers to choose participants.

Two of the chosen teams were based in consultant bureaus within Architecture and planning and two other ones in two non-profit cultural organizations. A fifth team was based in an inter-cultural resource center. The sixth team was put together to represent the interests of children and young people and included three architects and a drama teacher. No city politicians participated, a deficit largely owing to their own their decision not to do so.

The intention was to generate six parallel visions. As it turned out only a few ideas from these were picked up in the official development scheme. The decision-makers had not told the groups that they, the

groups, would not be part of the actual decision-making nor more specifically what kind of bearing they might expect to have on the process. Moreover it appears that the municipally owned Riverbank Development Company (as it was now called – Älvstranden Utveckling AB) and the politicians already had their own vision and agenda.<sup>6</sup> One of the teams had suggested grasping the opportunity to construct social housing, low cost rental flats or, if this was not possible, no housing at all, as a vision. When they put forward this proposition at one of the meetings this team was met with a frosty uncomfortable silence indicating that some basic tacit taboo had been broken. Issues like social housing and the plight of the homeless were obviously out of bounds.

Another vision was to span a simple bicycle bridge in an arch across the river to join the two banks. The idea was debated in the local press for a while but has never been seriously followed up.

### *Stuck in the middle of Arnstein's ladder of participation*

When the Gothenburg city architect Gunnar Larsson quit back in the late 1980's or early '90s to be replaced by an engineering-and-economics oriented director of the municipal building committee, his parting words were – "it can't be the task of the municipal building committee to boost the profitability of construction companies".<sup>7</sup> But this is just what happened.

It is not only a question of poor management but also one of what kind of role models are fostered, the moral economy of urban planning and planners one might say.

Now, is Gothenburg an isolated example? Is it unique? Yes, certainly it has specific features that differ from some other Swedish cities, like the absence of a city architect but then in the other cities these no longer have much power nowadays anyway. New Public Management clips their wings.

I shall come back to the anatomy and dynamics of NPM that prevents citizens from climbing up higher on the ladder of participation (Figure 1). First however it is useful to recall the classical paper by Sherry

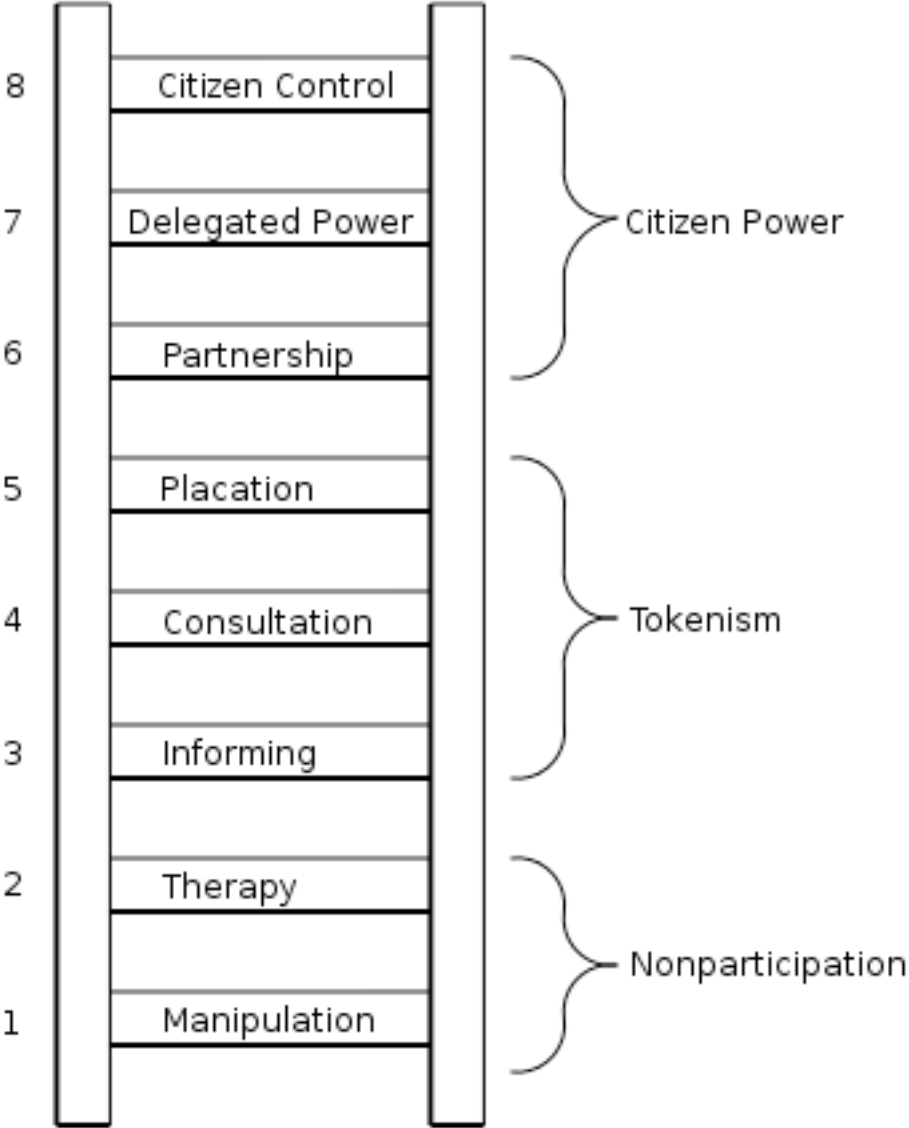
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<sup>6</sup> A candid account of the process is presented by one of the group or project leaders, Assoc. Professor Catharina Thörn, in a report entitled "Intervention or the need of a new cultural critique", *ArtMonitor* No. 5/2008, pp. 48-68. Also in the same journal see Henric Benesch and Peter Ullmark, "The experimental start of the Planning of Södra Älvstranden", pp. 28-33; and Staffan Schmidt, "Homeless intervention", pp. 73-85. The individual articles can be accessed via the link < [http://www.konst.gu.se/english/ArtMonitor/journal/5\\_2008/](http://www.konst.gu.se/english/ArtMonitor/journal/5_2008/)>. The process that evolved is also treated from a political science point of view in one of four case studies in a discussion of theories of democratic "governance". See Linda Genborg, *Från government till governance, Masters thesis in Political Science* (supervised by Assoc. Prof. Urban Strandberg), Fall term 2007, Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg.

<sup>7</sup> Sören Eriksson, *Ur mitt politiska liv* (2009), p. 40. Eriksson is a veteran social democratic politician, now retired. He was centrally involved in issues of urban planning in Gothenburg.

Arnstein that is often cited in the urban planning literature as a reference point for assessing degrees of participation.

**Figure 1.** Sherry Arnstein’s eight-stage ladder of participation<sup>8</sup>



Arnstein had a medical background and ended up working at a top level in Washington D.C. with implementation of plans for better health care in the southern U.S. during the period of the civil rights movement. Her idea of the “participation ladder” as an ideal typical scheme was born out of the

<sup>8</sup> Originally published as Arnstein, Sherry R. "A Ladder of Citizen Participation," *JAIP*, Vol. 35, No. 4, July 1969, pp. 216-224. See also < <http://lithgow-schmidt.dk/sherry-Figure 2. arnstein/ladder-of-citizen-participation.html>>.

frustration with bureaucracy and other forces that prevented empowerment of needy citizens.

**Figure 2.** Distinguishing reality from rhetoric



Sometimes it was simply a matter top-down decisions with no public participation, at other times there might be manipulation of public opinion. A higher form of preventing participation she identified was tokenism, a mode that is not far from describing what happened in the Gothenburg case described above. The paper in the version referred to here also has a telling image that distinguishes reality from rhetoric (Figure 2). The International Association for Public Participation has developed a spectrum of indicators for the different levels of public impact.<sup>9</sup>

### *New Public Management*

In as far as New Public Management methods of steering and accounting public projects have entered the scene there are a number of systemic constraints that tie the hands and minds of planners. A pivotal aspect is the departure of old time welfare state civil servant bureaucrats and their replacement by creative managers with their eyes focused on profits. No longer are budgetary allocations as input for facilitating mandated activities to serve social needs a primary focus. Rather the focus instead is on *outcomes* and new funds are allocated on the basis of distinct measurements of such outcomes with performance indicators.

Quasi-markets are set up externally to public service organizations and even internally within them to induce competition for funding of different activities as a part of cost-cutting mechanisms. Another principle is the demand that individual service units must cover their own costs. Contractual buyer-seller relationships with economic cost-benefit accountancy rather than the serving of social needs are the rule (i.e., agencification and contractualization). Performance indicators are often quantified to permit cost-benefit calculations by simple numbers.<sup>10</sup> This in turn fosters a culture of compliance with the new rules. All this is part of what Michael Power calls the *Audit Society*, with fragmentation of tasks.<sup>11</sup>

In order to try and increase its competitive advantage an institution in such an environment will pay more attention to public relations and developing its brand name (corporate branding). Not so strange then that whole cities too (and certain areas within them) use this strategy to try and enhance their "attractiveness", a quality that too must ultimately be valued in economic terms – more profits into private and public purses.

The shift from input to outcome-funding, and further to cost-cutting, quasi-markets and forced competition between various units in an entrepreneurial manner influences "trust". Whereas in the traditional

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<sup>9</sup> <<http://www.fermilabcommunity.org/pdfs/spectrum.pdf>>

<sup>10</sup> For my discussion of this phenomenon in academe and how it disfavours the humanities, see <<http://humaniorasociety.wordpress.com/2009/04/>>.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Power, *The Audit Society. Rituals of verification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999)

welfare state relations of trust between commissioners and performers of services and tasks were important systemic elements imbued with an ideology of solidarity, under NPM regimes there is a loss of trust, or rather the new relationship between commissioner and performer is systemically predicated on *mistrust*. This in turn is the institutional motive driving frequent evaluations of performance using quantitative indicators.

**Table 1:** Some basic NPM notions

\*More for less<sup>12</sup>

\*Marketization (including creation of quasi-markets in administrative organizations)

\*Commoditization of health care services, welfare benefits, teaching packages and research results (also those generated by publicly funded institutions)

\*Inducing competition between task performers

\*Turning citizens into consumers and clients (this goes for students too)

\*Agencification (contractification)

\*From administration to management (fostering the entrepreneurial bureaucrat)

\*From input to output/outcome control

Performance-based management (and funding), Performativity metrics (accountingization)

\*Reputation and image management (PR & branding)

\*Entrepreneurialism

\*Partnering

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<sup>12</sup> For some of the characteristics see Wolfgang Drechsler, "The Rise and Demise of the New Public Management" (2005), *Post-autistic Economic Review*, Issue no. 33, September 2005 (article 2): 1-9.

In the literature one can find many case studies on the impact of NPM. Some of the consequences are particularly evident in the case of development policy in Third World countries. One author who sees NPM as a gain since it introduces flexibility and provides for cost recovery in waste management systems in big cities, for example, nevertheless observes how deregulation has led to a proliferation of private entrepreneurs in the waste collection business, many of whom do not uphold the standards called for by policies meant to promote sustainable development.<sup>13</sup> Another author notes how in development policy under NPM regimes: "Result-based management approaches that have entered the field have the paradoxical effect of disempowering those it meant to empower".<sup>14</sup>

A case study on a public-private planning initiative in a city in the USA that used consensus-based collaborative meetings involving citizens in "visioning" to shape the future cityscape ended up with elites capturing the mechanics of the process. This led to a situation where dissent is difficult and the outcome tends to be a vision of the future that replicates the standard economic development models of powerful stakeholders.<sup>15</sup> The process becomes a kind of "therapy" similar to what we observed in the case of Gothenburg, a city where, by the way, NPM has produced a system where garbage collection has become the monopoly of a couple of large entrepreneurs that cut costs by employing fewer (overstressed) truck drivers and reducing the frequency of garbage runs so that at many recycling stations heaps of waste regularly accumulates between the various bins for separating two sorts of bottles, various cans, plastic containers, bulky package wrapping and cartons, newspapers, etc.

The number of examples of case studies of the influence of NPM on urban planning may be multiplied and of course one will find instances of gains in efficiency and flexibility of planning as well as some success stories. The major gist however seems to be one that confirms a shift from politics to economics and with it a systemic deficit in *citizen empowerment*, the highest rung on Arnstein's participation ladder. My point is that the mechanisms of NPM must be understood in order to explain how neoliberal agendas at a macro-level get translated into meso- and micro-level processes. Government becomes negotiated or orchestrated "governance" and administration becomes business "management".

Government entails formal institutions of state and legal frameworks involving old style civil servants. Governance involves

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<sup>13</sup> Meine Pieter van Dijk, *Urban management and Institutional Change. An integrated approach to achieving ecological cities*. Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies, Rotterdam. IHS Working Paper 16/2008.

<sup>14</sup> Partick Kilby, "Is empowerment possible under a New Public Management environment? Some lessons from India?", *International Public Management Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2004), pp. 207-225 (quotation from the Abstract on p. 207).

<sup>15</sup> Eugene J. McCann, "Collaborative visioning or urban planning as therapy? The politics of public-private policy making", *Professional Geographer*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (2001), pp. 207-218.

government plus looser processes of influencing and negotiating with a range of private corporate actors and public sector agencies as stakeholders where the stronger ones tend to set agendas. One gets what I want to refer to as "orchestration policy".

Even if NPM is now retreating at the theoretical level in favor of New Weberian Public Management thinking that once more begins to emphasize the necessity of a "commons" in order to counteract partitioning and fragmentation, it is safe to say that NPM still reigns in a lot of thinking and action, also in urban planning. At the same time it is meeting resistance and vocal opposition from the side of critical scholars, architects, urban planners, geographers, cultural studies departments as well as social movements involving youth, minority groups and the homeless.

### *Opposition to the New Metropolitan Mainstream trend*

Those of you who live in Switzerland will know about the INURA Conference on Neoliberal Urban Development held at the Zürich *Rote Fabrik*, June 27-30, 2010.<sup>16</sup> It was the 20th conference of the International Network for Urban Research and Action (INURA) that are annually hosted by local branches of this bottom-up global network, the venue rotating between major cities of the world. It all started in Zürich in 1991. If you don't know about it, you should! The network deals directly with urban research and action.<sup>17</sup> At this most recent conference the theme was New Metropolitan Mainstream development as a paradigm in urban development practices. Experiences of developments in many cities in various countries were reviewed, again confirming what I have described in the case of Gothenburg as an example of a more general trend.<sup>18</sup>

Michael Dear in his book *The Postmodern Urban Condition* (2000) refers to the process of partitioning of urban space as something that leads to what he calls Keno Capitalism. It is a term borrowed from the lottery game Keno, the analogy being that of a spatial dynamics of randomness whereby capital flows touch down as if by chance on a parcel of land, ignoring the opportunities on intervening lots, thus sparking the development process. The resulting structure is one where some areas get developed and others not, leading to a noncontiguous collage of parcelized, consumption-oriented landscapes devoid of conventional centers and increasing social polarization. The notion is patterned on the model of Los Angeles where different regions of the city congregate

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<sup>16</sup> See < <http://www.inura.org/2010/welcome.html>>

<sup>17</sup> Affiliated is the *International Journal of Urban and regional Research*.

<sup>18</sup> See also the reviews of international regeneration strategies in various regions of the world as presented in the anthology by Libby Porter and Kate Shaw (Eds.), *Whose Urban Renaissance? An international comparison of urban planning strategies*. (Milton Park, Oxford: Routledge 2008).

around business areas (corporate citadels), command and control centers, events and spectacle areas, theme parks, suburban supermarkets, gated communities, poor areas with street warfare, and peripheral "edge cities".<sup>19</sup> Other authors use other conceptual frames and images to depict and analyze the phenomena.<sup>20</sup> The INURA conference in Zürich June 2010, for example, presented the following rationale.

"Under the influence of neoliberalization and globalization, a new paradigm of urban development has evolved, which we call New Metropolitan Mainstream. This term brings together different processes leading towards an increasing economization of urban life: gentrification, urban regeneration, forced upgrading of neighborhoods, luxury transformation of entire inner city areas, privatization of public goods and spaces, instrumentalization of flagship projects and international events in order to attract international investments and people with a high income."<sup>21</sup>

Empty glass and steel high rise offices with gaping windows and an unfinished Grand Opera House in Reykjavik bear witness to the legacy of a small number of speculators when Iceland's financial bubble burst.

In New Orleans after the Hurricane Katarina disaster the U.S. Department of Housing in its plan for rebuilding residential areas blocked returning former residents of blocks of well built public housing from reoccupying their homes because these blocks were slated for demolition to make way for so-called "mixed housing". "Variation" in housing units and "densifying" use per area is a popular Mainstream Metropolitan Development melody nowadays.

In New Orleans developers, contractors and firms supplying products and services ended up making substantial profits, while many displaced inhabitants were forced to join the homeless and thus the housing struggle there continues. International attention momentarily culminated in October 2009 with the first official visit to the United States from the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, Raquel Rolnik, an urban planner and architect from Brazil.

After visits to seven sites in the U.S. including Chicago, New York and New Orleans she stated in her report that, as "demolished units are replaced by market-rate housing, many 'affordable' units are too costly for many public housing tenants".<sup>22</sup> Further: "The Special Rapporteur deeply regrets the demolition of thousands of public housing units in New

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<sup>19</sup> Michael J. Dear, *The Postmodern Urban Condition* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers), see Figure 7.4 in the book.

<sup>20</sup> See e.g., David Harvey, "The Right to the City", *New Left Review*, No. 53, Sept-Oct 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Conference Announcement.

<sup>22</sup> Raquel Rolnik, *Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development. Addendum - Mission to the United States of America*. Report to the UN Human Rights Council 3th Session, Agenda Item 3. Geneva: A/HRC/13/20 Add 4, 12 February 2010, p. 11. The report is based on the Rapporteur's official visit to the U.S. from 22 Oct-8 Nov 2009.

Orleans. Many residents and victims of Hurricane Katrina were prevented from returning to their homes (many of which according to residents sustained little storm damage) and had their homes demolished. The current housing crisis in New Orleans reflects the disastrous impact of the demolition policy. In particular, the demolition of the 'Big Four' housing complexes (B.W. Copper, C.J. Peete, Lafitte and St. Bernard) has displaced approximately 20,000 individuals. Only one public housing complex still remains, Iberville, which is in need of better maintenance. Residents of Iberville fear demolition of their homes. In addition, former public housing residents of New Orleans are facing grave housing challenges in other cities. One New Orleans resident told the Special Rapporteur that he had met Katrina survivors who are homeless or close to homeless in other cities, 'the legacy of the demolition policy'.<sup>23</sup>

Rolnik's general conclusion: An approach to housing redevelopment has overly emphasized housing as real estate rather than as a basic social need. This approach has led to displacement of public housing residents, disruption of families and the social fabric of neighborhoods.

Rolnik's report also explains the prevalence and mechanism of "predatory equity" found in the housing sector.

"Predatory equity appeared during the recent real-estate bubble, described as an investor purchasing a rent-stabilized building, with a mortgage which is securitized and sold repeatedly over a short period of time for ever-increasing sums. The resulting mortgage payments increase with each sale, with existing rent rolls insufficient to cover the cost. As a result, new owners engage in aggressive tactics to evict residents in order to raise rents to subsequent residents, and eventually remove the building from the rent stabilization scheme. Given the downturn in the real estate market, there exists a high risk that such mortgages will default, and the Special Rapporteur heard reports of investors simply walking away, leaving the building to the bank, and tenants with uncertain futures. The Special Rapporteur also noticed that while the impacts of predatory equity are being felt across the country, they have been most acute in New York, where the full effect of foreclosures has yet to be felt. In New York alone, one civil society organization has identified over 90,000 rent-stabilized units subject to predatory equity."<sup>24</sup>

It is examples like this that cry out for change. Following a workshop on urban research and action at the Graduate Centre, City University of New York (CUNY) December 12, 2008 with keynote speakers Peter Marcuse, Margit Mayer, Susan Fainstein and David Harvey, the journal *CITY* came out with a special double issue with the theme "Cities for people, not for profit" that takes up the radical urbanism movement associated with the oppositional trend that goes under the name of "Right to the City".<sup>25</sup> In the introduction one can find the following statement:

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 16-17.

<sup>25</sup> The long title of the journal is *CITY --- journal for analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action*. The double issue referred to here is vol. 13, June-September 2009, issues 2 and

"The rapidly unfolding global economic recession of 2008-9 is dramatically intensifying the contradictions around which urban social movements have been rallying, suddenly validating their claims regarding the unsustainability and destructiveness of capitalist forms of urbanization. Against this background, it appears increasingly urgent to understand how different types of cities are being repositioned with increasingly volatile, financial circuits of capital accumulation. Equally important is the question of how crisis has provoked or constrained alternative visions of urban life that point beyond capitalism as a structuring principle of political-economic and spatial organization".

The INURA conference in Zürich positioned itself centrally in relationship to this theme. In 2008 INURA started a project under the heading "The New Metropolitan Mainstream" to explore the similarities and differences between today's cities. At the July 2010 conference more than thirty groups reported their findings about their cities.<sup>26</sup> A general conclusion is that the New Metropolitan Mainstream has to be seen as a long-term tendency, which started in certain places already some decades ago. Today, it is found in many variations and it affects not only world cities, but also former peripheral regions and smaller cities. The New Metropolitan Mainstream leads to a dramatic change of urban development and everyday life. At the same time, as new disparities and inequities are produced, many urban areas are turned into exclusive places for privileged people.

### *Two approaches to participation anno 2010*

The surge of the "Right to the City" movement has also surfaced at the level of intergovernmental deliberations and action. This is evident from the World Urban Forum (WUF) that took place in Rio de Janeiro March 22-26, 2010. The WUF is organized by UN-HABITAT every two years as an open space to debate the most up-to-date issues related to urban development worldwide, with a strong focus on urban poverty and environment. This event gathers all sorts of people, from slum community leaders to prime ministers. The theme this year was: The Right to the City – Bridging the Urban Divide.<sup>27</sup>

Parallel to this event the more radical wing of the Right to the City movement organized workshops under the auspices of the global NGO

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3. The concluding panel discussion is recorded on u-tube. Peter Marcuse, prof. em. (urban planning) at Columbia University is the son of Herbert Marcuse who was associated with the critical theory of the early Frankfurt School and Peter Marcuse uses that theory as a point of departure for research and action. See homepage <<http://www.marcuse.org/peter/peter.htm>>. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkKXt6lTTD4>>.

Also see <[http://www.tidesfoundation.org/fileadmin/tf\\_pdfs/TheRightToTheCity.pdf](http://www.tidesfoundation.org/fileadmin/tf_pdfs/TheRightToTheCity.pdf)>.

<sup>26</sup> See <http://www.inura.org/contact.html>

<sup>27</sup> *World Urban Forum 5th Session. Background Document* (Nairobi: UN HABITAT Secretariat 2010 – HSP/WUF/5/2).

network, Social Urban Forum (SUF)<sup>28</sup>, at a venue nearby and even some protests with posters outside the WUF meetings. The SUF gathered only about 5% of the number of persons attending the WUF, but its message was also more radical, claiming that there was a tendency whereby the Right to the City movement was being captured and harnessed to reformist activities that do not challenge the basic structure of mainstream metropolitan development. Hence the distinction was introduced between urban development and urban radicalism. The difference may be conceptualized in terms of a distinction between a "weak program" (WUF) and a "strong program" of a call to urban critique, research, visions, action and implementation of alternatives to the mainstream. Both David Harvey and Peter Marcuse have discussed the difference:

David Harvey: "best practices" were a mantra at the WUF, but barely mentioned at the SUF;

Peter Marcuse:

For WUF right to the city is a laundry list for immediate stopgap measures.

For SUF the vision was oriented with immediate problems, but also goes beyond these; thus utopias were a topic of discussion there. One of the outcomes of the SUF was the Rio Declaration.<sup>29</sup> The declaration extends a call for action in neighborhoods and in the world, fighting for the right to the city, for democracy and urban justice. It points especially to circumstances in the Third World, but is also relevant for developments in our part of the world. The perspective is strategic but at the same time with attention to the kind of dynamics we have already noted in perhaps less flagrant forms in our own cities. Thus we read:

"Led by entrepreneurial mayors, free from public control and engaged in public-private partnerships, this city would be able to seize opportunities and secure its competitive advantages in the cities market, competing for foreign capital, investments, tourists and mega-events. This neo-liberal city, market oriented and market friendly, is simultaneously consequence and condition of the structural adjustment imposed by international consultants and by IMF, World Bank and other multilateral agencies diffused recipes."

Differences between the weak program of the WUF and the strong program of the SUF reflect a difference of ideals and targets. The SUF approach is predicated on an ideal of emancipation and its advocates claim that the WUF approach is easily encapsulate by established elites and therefore may end up in mere palliative actions. In line with this the more radical motto as formulated by Peter Marcuse is "expose, propose, politicize". This approach to linking research and implementation is anchored in an alternative vision inspired by the critical theory of the

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<sup>28</sup> See < <http://usf2010.wordpress.com/>>.

<sup>29</sup> Rio de Janeiro Declaration - Social Urban Forum, March 2010. See extracts in the Appendix below.

Frankfurt School. It is a call to radical urbanism or grass roots mobilization as a platform from which co-deliberation may be entertained. The approach is fundamentally transformative and warns for the danger of marginal transformations that do not open for broader alternatives.

The differences, however, do not only revolve around overall perspective and strategy but also concern a number of more specific points reflected in current debates on urban development. Although the two approaches both oppose the New Metropolitan Mainstream paradigm, they do so in different ways. The WUF approach - perhaps more readily - accepts the principle of "right to accessibility" to the city whereas the SUF insists on the "right to proximity". The right to accessibility can be accommodated by rapid transport from outlying parts of the city or vice versa when citizens want to enjoy amenities or services not found in their own area. The right to proximity concept rejects that principle as a solution to problems of accessing services, goods and events since it leaves untouched city partitioning and segregation. The point is that necessary amenities and services should exist in one's own local vicinity and therewith enhance its community character in what might be called a more traditional way. "Right of proximity" counter poses itself against partitioning.

Another difference concerns the question of new social housing where the SUF approach takes an anti-consumerism standpoint whereas the WUF approach, being reformist, may more readily go along with framing citizens as consumers of housing, which then would reinforce commoditization. Thence, the accent in the two cases falls on housing "production" and "consumption", respectively. By and large the weak program of opposition is moderately anti-mainstream while the strong program claims to uphold radical urban theory and practice ("radical urbanism").

In terms of participation and the concept of democracy the former approach tends to align with a representative democratic model or alternatively a deliberative model of democracy, while the approach of the strong program implicates an agonistic model. The Agonistic model of democracy, as opposed to the deliberative model, takes recognition of conflict and insistence of essential differences of interests as the basis for constructive action and plan implementation. In addition it calls for a *translation* of the epistemological problem inherent in Max Weber's idea of a neutral value free science into a full-blooded Marxist problematique concerning an essential tension between objectivity and partisanship in science.<sup>30</sup> Also note that Agonistic is not the same as antagonistic.

The political scientist Chantal Mouffe has articulated the concept "agonistic" in the discourse on participation and citizen empowerment.<sup>31</sup> It has also been incorporated in discussions on different

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<sup>30</sup> Aant Elzinga, "Objectivity and partisanship in science", *Ethnos* (Stockholm) Nos. 1-4 (1975), pp. 406-427; link <http://www.autodidactproject.org/other/aant1.html>.

<sup>31</sup> For a development of this 'agonistic' approach, see Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, (London: Verso, 2000), chapter 4.

models of Public Understanding of Science (a field within STS) in connection with the notion of modes of citizen participation, issues of governance and the concept of "scientific citizenship" (see above, Introduction).<sup>32</sup> It is useful in the present context to distinguish the challenge of radical urbanism to traditional consensus-oriented deliberative processes like focal groups, consultations and hearings that do not have a strong bearing on municipal decision-making.

In the table that follows I have tried to summarize.

**Table 2: Opposition to the New Metropolitan Mainstream**

The weak programme	The strong programme
<i>WUF</i>	<i>SUF</i>
-consensual	-agonistic
-the right to accessibility to the city	-the right to proximity in the city
-co-deliberation	-expose, propose, politicize
-drift to palliative actions	-emancipatory ideal
-danger of marginal niche transformative outcomes	-fundamentally transformative
-may condone partitioning	-opposes partitioning
-danger of cooptation into consumerism/commoditization	-seeks citizen //empowerment
- moderate anti-NMM	-radical urbanism

*Concluding remarks*

As indicated at the outset the paper presented here is mainly conceptual, although it takes its point of departure in observations on experience of

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<sup>32</sup> Also Mark Elam and Margareta Bertilsson, "Consuming, engaging and confronting science. The emerging dimensions of scientific citizenship", *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (May 2003), pp. 233-251.

the last three decades of urban planning in the city of Gothenburg in Sweden. It is found that the deficit in citizen participation in this city is not unique but illustrates a more general trend called the New Metropolitan Mainstream (NMM). It is argued that the entry of New Public Management that replaces traditional forms of public administration and accountability moreover tends to frame citizens as consumers and therefore the participation deficit is a systemic feature. Opposition to NMM as expressed in the Right to the City movement furthermore is found to have two wings. Differences between them are explored as a foil for further debate and studies regarding interplay between research and action in transdisciplinary approaches to urban planning and implementation. The report by Raquel Rolnik to the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations regarding the right to decent housing defines a necessary requirement for meaningful "participation": "In adopting measures to achieve the full realization of the right to adequate housing, a genuine consultation with, and participation by, all those affected, including the homeless, the inadequately housed and their representatives, should be guaranteed. Efforts should be made to ensure that residents are involved from the beginning of any redevelopment or other projects, and continue to be engaged during the entire process."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Op. cit., above, p. 27.

## **Appendix**

Extracts from Rio de Janeiro Declaration - Social Urban Forum, March 2010.

Transnational corporations, multilateral agencies and their advocates have already foreseen the ideal XXI'st century city: it is globalized, tied by flows and hierarchies to the global markets; a city tied to the few who control and rule the markets from their headquarters in the global cities. Conceived and managed as if it was a corporation, this city sails in the global competitive seas and its governance mirrors the corporative management: marketing, competitiveness, pragmatism, flexibility and decision-making processes centralization should be the virtues of urban government. Led by entrepreneurial mayors, free from public control and engaged in public-private partnerships, this city would be able to seize opportunities and secure its competitive advantages in the cities market, competing for foreign capital, investments, tourists and mega-events. This neo-liberal city, market oriented and market friendly, is simultaneously consequence and condition of the structural adjustment imposed by international consultants and by IMF, World Bank and other multilateral agencies diffused recipes.

Its perverse consequences are, however, evident: more inequality, increasing of unemployment and poverty levels, quality of life degradation for millions, violence increase, frustration, despair. Vulnerable groups, ethnic and cultural minorities, migrants and women suffer particularly, due to the discrimination added to their misery. The new standard, together with its characteristic urban scenarios, imposes itself all over the world. The urban fabric is progressively being decomposed.